

William R. Estep, ed. *Anabaptist Beginnings (1523-1533): A Source Book*, Bibliotheca humanistica et reformatrica. Nieuwkoop: B. De Graff, 1976. Pp. vii, 172. \$135.00. Cloth.

One man's noise is another man's symphony. Indeed, for Huldreich Zwingli the sirens of Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Pilgram Marpeck clamored in complete cacophony to the Zwinglian idea of a Magisterial Reformation. What is more, most of the historiographical tradition that followed until the twentieth century agreed with Zwingli that the Anabaptists were disorderly radicals of extreme dissonance. However, for William R. Estep, the works of the Anabaptists created a tune of a different kind. Signaling the reemergence of the Free Church, these were songs of harmonic precision providing the motivating accompaniment for the beginnings of an ecclesiastical revolution.

In his twenty-first year of teaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, William Roscoe Estep assembled and edited a volume of primary source works that chronicle the genesis of the Anabaptist Reformation. When originally published, *Anabaptist Beginnings* took its place in the already stacked arsenal from which Estep was firing toward those who sought to discount the validity of the Anabaptist movement. Estep waved proudly the Anabaptist flag in an era that had never before seen it, much less seen it defended.

At the outset, Estep acknowledges that the works contained in *Anabaptist Beginnings* have been "published primarily for the student of Anabaptism who lacks the skills to translate the sixteenth century Latin and German sources for himself" (v). This is no small undertaking as Estep translated nine out of the eighteen tracts. However, Estep's labor received mixed reviews when presented to the public in 1976. While most reviewers lauded the translation work and the contribution to Anabaptist studies in the English language, some did not, citing the work as contributing further to the decline of work among students in the original languages (See R. Gerald Hobbs' review in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 29 no 1 Ja 1978, pp. 123). While this might very well be the case, one might surmise that it was more important to Estep to have students read the likes of Balthasar Hubmaier in English than not at all.

Aside from the translations themselves, Estep's own work appears in the form of a general introduction at the beginning of the volume and shorter introductions prior to each article. Estep reveals his intention that this work serve as a "documentary supplement" to his earlier treatment, *The Anabaptist Story* (now in its third revised edition, Eerdmans 1996).

For the purpose of summary, this review will divide Estep's work into thirds. The first third consists of five tracts that begins with the *Second Zürich Disputation* (October, 1523) and ends one year later in October 1524. The events of the Second Disputation reveal the growing dissention between Huldreich Zwingli and his student, Conrad Grebel. Grebel's subsequent refusal to accept the city council's decision regarding the abuses of the mass mark, for Estep, the beginning of the Free Church movement. Meanwhile, in South Germany, Balthasar Hubmaier publishes his *Eighteen Theses* as the basis for his own Disputation that would serve to encourage the Zürich Radicals. The remaining tracts in this first section consist of letters written by Conrad Grebel that reveal his reaction to the events of the Second Disputation. These letters show the theological independency of the Swiss Anabaptists from both Zwingli and Thomas Müntzer.

The second third of Estep's work covers the important literary contributions from September 1524 to June 1527. Returning to the work of Hubmaier, this section provides Hubmaier's *Petitions* to Austrian authorities where he defends his teachings against claims of heresy and pleads for the opportunity to show the foundation of his beliefs in Scripture. Hubmaier's *Concerning Heretics* follows defining true heresy as the practice of those who undermine the Scripture, and defends religious liberty by denying the church's use of the sword to coerce belief. Felix Mantz's

Declaration in 1525 advances the doctrine of believer's baptism in opposition to the teachings of Zwingli and consistent with Mantz's understanding of Scripture.

The Twelve Articles of the Peasants contributes a lay perspective to Estep's volume. Within the document are references to some form of congregational participation in the selection of a pastor as well as the centrality of the Word of God for faith and practice. Another work of Hubmaier also is featured in this section with his defense of believer's baptism. Next, Estep includes the first Anabaptist Confession of Faith composed by the Swiss and South German leaders. *The Schleithem Confession* is more of an ecclesiological treatise than anything else, but it does codify the present concerns of the movement in 1527. Estep concludes this section by providing Hubmaier's *On the Sword*, where he distinguishes between two kinds of swords, the spiritual and the temporal. Christians are to use the spiritual in dealing with Satan, and the magistrate is to use the temporal to ensure peace in the land (117). These two swords do not reside in conflict.

The final third of Estep's volume covers the ground from October 1527 to January 1532. A tract of the Austrian Anabaptists on the discipline of the believers in the church reads like an early church covenant. It contains twelve articles that set boundaries for their Christian life together complete with a variety of Scripture references. Next, Estep includes a sample of a work by the Anabaptist mystic, Hans Denck, entitled *Recantation*. It reads more like an Anabaptist apologetic with only one vague concluding statement that could, depending on the interpretation, communicate a type of recanting.

The next document recounts a conversation between a Catholic confessor, John Faber, and Hubmaier. Hermeneutics and infant baptism are the topics discussed and Hubmaier's erudition does not disappoint. Following this text is *An Anonymous Anabaptist Pamphlet* written to encourage Anabaptists not to waver from their convictions regarding the Lord's Supper and the relationship of the church to the magistrate.

The remaining documents include a *Confession of Faith* by Pilgram Marpeck and the hymn *God's Word Stands Sure Forever*, by Balthasar Hubmaier. Dealing with the relationships between law and gospel, old covenant and new covenant, circumcision and baptism, Marpeck addresses the salient points of Anabaptist theology. Hubmaier's hymn proceeds chronologically covering major figures in the Old Testament, the person of Jesus Christ, the four Gospel writers and Paul the Apostle. The concluding stanzas recount the steadfastness of the Word of God and its relationship to the believer's assurance before God.

Anabaptist Beginnings by William R. Estep portrays the Anabaptists in their own words and in their own context. Estep's work would find greater strength if the introductory sections were revised to bring greater clarity to the significance of each work to the whole volume, not just to the context of the Anabaptist movement. Deficient aesthetics such as text layout (convoluted), font size (small), and price of the volume (expensive) are all deterrents as well, but should not keep the Anabaptist student or scholar from purchasing this volume. Sheer recognition of the value of the primary sources makes *Anabaptist Beginnings* a requirement for the Baptist studies bookshelf.

While perhaps not a virtuoso composer of these component documents of Anabaptist theological and historical development, Estep does deftly craft a work that shows the harmonic nature of the Anabaptist movement. There will no doubt be Reformation scholars, William Whitsitt-type Baptists, and a host of other historians who will continue to hear Hubmaier and the others through the overtures of M \ddot{u} nzter radicalism. However, while these might consider Anabaptists and Anabaptism mere dissonant noise of little value in the Reformation era, Estep rightly reinterprets and presents them as a triumphant symphony whose music still sounds forth with great effect today.

Jason G. Duesing
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary